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Bridging the Generation Gap in the LGBT+ Community through Advocacy

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HONORING ELDERS THROUGH ADVOCACY LEADERSHIP, & TOGETHERNESS

**HONORS PROJECT
BY MELANIE MOORE**

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HONORS PROJECT

Thank you to my advisors, Dr. Beatrice Guenther and Dr. Abhishek Bhati, for the guidance through this crazy semester. This internship did not go as I planned, but thank you for helping me roll with the punches!

FOREWORD

The primary development period for this project occurred before the coronavirus pandemic, and before much of daily life for people across the world significantly changed. The unprecedented events of the COVID-19 situation particularly affect the elderly and immunocompromised. As the months go on and I continue to work with SAGE Cleveland to develop this project, I know that certain aspects of the project must be amended to accommodate the lifestyle changes that will take place over the coming months in response to the coronavirus. These changes will follow CDC guidelines (United States) and national health guidelines (Portugal).

My main priority in creating this project was to foster a sense of community across generations in the LGBT+ community while addressing a need for LGBT+ older adults. It is my greatest hope that in the future, there is room for this type of program. I fully acknowledge that the coming months may not be the safest time for implementation of this project. It is my firm belief that everyone should be doing their part to prevent the spread of coronavirus to limit the impact of the COVID-19 disease. It is my sincere hope that when we emerge from this crisis, our community will be eager to embrace programs that lessen the generational divide, thus uniting us even more, despite the virus forcing us to spend so much time apart.

Thank you for reviewing this project while considering the context of the world today.

Best,
Melanie Moore
BGSU Honors College; Undergraduate Student

HONORING OUR ELDERS

The history of the Gay Rights Movement in the United States is inspiring. Stories of the Stonewall era and the Gay Liberation movement of the 1970s inspire those who fight for equal rights for the LGBT+ community today, both in the United States and abroad. The young people who led Gay Rights Movement in the 1970s and 1980s are now retirement age, making up a considerable portion of the Baby Boomer and the World War II generations. Their work made it possible for rapid progress to be made for LGBT+ human rights in the United States. However, because these older generations faced different stigma and oppression during their youth than LGBT+ folks face today, a generational divide exists within the LGBT+ community. This makes LGBT+ older adults feel isolated from the LGBT+ community.

34% OF LGBT+ OLDER ADULTS REPORT THAT THEY HAVE “NO ONE” TO TAKE CARE OF THEM IN CASE OF EMERGENCY. (PEREIRA ET AL, 2019)

Many LGBT+ older adults never married in their lifetimes due to the stigma and legal barriers that came with gay marriage. Without spouses, children, or family members, it can be hard for LGBT+ older adults to make connections with other people in times of need.

LGBT+ RESPONDENTS STATED THAT THEY DID NOT DISCLOSE THEIR IDENTITY TO THEIR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS, SINCE “THEY BELIEVED THEY WOULD NOT RECEIVE FRIENDLY SERVICES IF PROVIDERS BECAME AWARE OF THE MINORITY SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY” (CROGHAN, MOONE, & OLDSON, 2014)

As LGBT+ older adults age, they will depend more on healthcare systems. Many LGBT+ older adults do not feel

comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation to their doctors for fear of discrimination, and the stress that comes with discrimination. However, the failure to disclose sexual orientation could contribute to certain health risks for LGBT+ patients, such as the failure to diagnose mental illnesses like anxiety and depression, which appear more often in people with LGBT+ status.

**HOW CAN WE HELP LGBT+ OLDER
ADULTS FEEL LESS ISOLATED FROM
THE LGBT+ COMMUNITY AND SAFER IN
HEALTHCARE SITUATIONS?**

HONORING ELDERS THROUGH ADVOCACY, LEADERSHIP, AND TOGETHERNESS (HEALTH) - OUR MISSION

HEALTH is a program designed to meet the needs of LGBT+ older adults by connecting them with volunteers of LGBT+ nonprofit organizations. Through HEALTH, LGBT+ youth and older adults can form connections that can extend beyond the structure of the program. By connecting younger volunteers with older adults, HEALTH can help grow the social capital of the LGBT+ community. Fostering friendly relationships between people of all ages can influence the progress of LGBT+ rights moving forward by combining the experience of the elders with the technological and social capabilities of the youth.

When an LGBT+ organization agrees to run HEALTH, they dedicate a few volunteers to serving LGBT+ older adults in their community. These volunteers will accompany an LGBT+ older adult to a healthcare appointment, and have the responsibility to assist the LGBT+ older adult report any discrimination by the healthcare provider to the appropriate channel. The volunteer is there to be a support system for the LGBT+ older adult, and an advocate if the situation calls for it.

When an LGBT+ calls the nonprofit seeking the HEALTH service, the nonprofit is expected to set up a partnership between the LGBT+ older adult and the volunteer. It is recommended that, when possible, the LGBT+ older adult be paired with a volunteer whose gender expression matches their preference. For example, if a transgender man older adult prefers to be paired with a transgender man volunteer, the nonprofit should do its best to pair these two together. If a woman prefers to be paired with another female-identifying person, these two should be paired together. This is for the comfort of the LGBT+ older adult and the volunteer. If, for any reason, the volunteer or the LGBT+ older adult is uncomfortable with their partner, they are permitted to request a re-match.

Once the partnership is formed, the LGBT+ older adult and the volunteer-advocate are expected to “meet” over the phone. When possible, it is encouraged that this meeting be arranged over video chat to familiarize both parties with the others’ appearance. In any case, the pair should introduce themselves, disclose the location and time details of the appointment, and arrange a meeting place. The meeting place should be public for the safety of the volunteer and the LGBT+ older adult.

The volunteer shall attend the appointment with the LGBT+ older adult. The appointment may be for any reason. The volunteer will advocate for the LGBT+ older adult should they face discrimination due to their sexual orientation in a healthcare setting. This includes discrimination by healthcare administrators and/or healthcare providers.

Sexual orientation discrimination is defined as treating someone differently based on their real or perceived sexual orientation. Discrimination can be many different things. During visits, the volunteer should look out for signs that their LGBT+ older adult is experiencing different treatment than someone who had not disclosed their sexual orientation. This

may come in the forms of harassment, which is the outright verbal or physical mistreatment of someone due to sexual orientation, or in the forms of micro-aggressions, such as crude jokes or assumptions being made about the LGBT+ older adult because of their sexual orientation.

If the LGBT+ older adult feels that they have been discriminated against in the healthcare setting, it is the duty of the volunteer to serve as a witness and an advocate to the event. Both parties should write their account of the incident, including the name of the physician (if possible), the date, and the time. Then, the volunteer can help the LGBT+ older adult decide their next steps. If they wish to report the discrimination, research the healthcare facility's means for reporting a physician or administrator.

* If they wish to file a Civil Rights Complaint, they may do so online here: <https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/filing-a-complaint/complaint-process/index.html?language=en>

* If they wish to file a complaint against a doctor, nurse, or other position that requires a license, contact the state's licensing board for that type of provider. For example, the Ohio Board of Nursing has provided this easily-accessible guide to filing a complaint about a nurse on their website: <http://nursing.ohio.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/92719-guide-to-complaint-and-investigation-process.pdf>

While the details of this resource guide focus heavily on United States resources, this program could benefit from being adapted to suit different cultures. The goal of the HEALTH program is to establish friendly relationships between youth volunteers at LGBT+ nonprofits and LGBT+ older adults by addressing the issues of elder loneliness. This is more than a United States issue; elder loneliness is a need that is difficult to address. This program attempts address this need in a flexible way for the volunteer and the LGBT+ older adult. The volunteer, through advocacy, strengthens their communication skills. The LGBT+ older adult gains a confidant and the security in knowing that they do indeed have someone to turn to in the case of healthcare discrimination. In both cases, social capital increases and better prepares the well-connected person for success as an LGBT+ person in a heterosexist world.

ACQUIRING FUNDS

This structure of this program allows for HEALTH to be applied in many different settings. Nonprofits or nongovernmental organizations with limited funds can tweak the model to reduce anticipated transportation and marketing costs. Nonprofits with few volunteers can run this program on a smaller scale, or potentially use this program as a recruitment strategy for volunteers and fundraising. Organizations with larger budgets can accommodate beneficiaries by subsidizing transportation costs for volunteers and/or beneficiaries, purchasing more online advertising, or even connecting beneficiaries with legal representatives, if needed. The purpose of this flexible model is to help as many beneficiaries as possible within reason while limiting the financial and labor costs to the organization.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON REPORTING DISCRIMINATION BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY, PLEASE READ:

What to Do if You Experience Discrimination – Human Rights Campaign:

<https://www.hrc.org/resources/what-to-do-if-you-experience-discrimination>



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